



PORT GAMBLE S'KLALLAM TRIBE
31912 Little Boston Rd. NE – Kingston, WA 98346

July 10, 2024

The Hon. Bruce Westerman, Chair
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
202 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Hon. Raúl Grijalva, Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
1203 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Hon. Cliff Bentz, Chair
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife &
Fisheries
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
1332 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Hon. Jared Huffman, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife & Fisheries
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
1332 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: H.R. 6841, A bill to establish a Coastal and Estuarine Resilience and Restoration Program

Dear Chair Westerman, Ranking Member Grijalva, Chair Bentz, and Ranking Member Huffman:

On behalf of the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe, I am writing to express our support for the bipartisan Resilient Coasts and Estuaries Act, H.R.6841. However, we ask that the bill be amended to include Tribal governments in the list of governments that can participate in the Coastal and Estuarine Resilience and Restoration Program. There has been too little attention to the growing needs of our nation's coastal tribal communities in recent years. This is particularly true for the Pacific Northwest, where coastlines are eroding at an alarming rate, and essential salmon and shellfish species are steeply declining. The Resilient Coasts and Estuaries Act revitalizes key federal programs that aim to combat these challenges. ***In recognition of the urgency of coastal decline, we urge you to amend the bill to include Tribal governments in the Coastal and Estuarine Resilience and Restoration Program and pass the Resilient Coasts and Estuaries Act out of Committee, and we ask that Congress approve this bill during the 118th Congress.***

The Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe is a sovereign nation of over 1,342 citizens located on the tip of the Kitsap Peninsula of Puget Sound in Northwest Washington State. In our language, "S'Klallam" means "the Strong People," and despite having been displaced from our ancestral homelands and faced with challenges that threatened our way of life, our Tribe has survived, and thrived, because of the strength, determination, and wisdom of our ancestors. In 1855, our ancestors negotiated the Treaty of Point No Point, which, among other things, reserved our hunting, fishing, and gathering rights. We rely on those Treaty rights to this day for subsistence, commerce, and the continuation of our traditions and culture. Yet, in recent decades, we have seen a sharp decline in important fish and shellfish species, particularly our salmon, due to environmental impacts such as habitat degradation, pollution, and shifting ecosystems. Our people feel these impacts every day as they eat away at our Treaty rights. Even as we seek to



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implement restoration plans, we are hampered by a lack of available funding and inadequate partnerships from federal agencies. This is entirely inconsistent with the United States' obligations under the 1855 Treaty of Point No Point and its other trust and treaty obligations to protect our lands and resources and provide for the health and well-being of our citizens. Respect for Tribal sovereignty, like respect for the rule of law itself, requires more than mere acknowledgment. It requires federal agencies to act in accordance with our right to make decisions affecting our lands, resources, and citizens. This includes our responsibility to govern on issues affecting our environmental health, safety, and wellness.

The Resilient Coasts and Estuaries Act is essential to bringing the federal government more in line with its trust and treaty obligation to our Tribe. It would revitalize and improve two programs that are essential to protecting and promoting the environmental resiliency of Puget Sound. First, this bill reauthorizes the Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program (CELCP), which has been without funding since 2017. CELCP provides funds to state, regional, and other units of governments to protect coastal and estuarine areas of ecological and historic value. Funding from this program is needed to support essential conservation activities. Coastal restoration projects in Port Gamble Bay, Quilcene Bay, and other coastal embayments throughout our usual and accustomed area will provide important nearshore habitat for salmon, Pacific herring, and other species. Life stages of salmon are tied to the shallow estuaries and nearshore habitats for refuge from predation, abundant food sources, and an osmoregulatory transition during juvenile migration. Impairments from shoreline armoring, fill, and overwater structures inhibit the growth of aquatic vegetation and degrade nearshore habitats. Funding for projects like the Port Gamble shoreline restoration and the Quilcene Bay restoration will go a long way to improve coastal processes and restore nearshore habitat for salmon, herring, and shellfish that are critical for Tribal subsistence and commercial harvesting.

Second, the Resilient and Coastal Estuaries Act directs the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency to designate five new National Estuarine Research Reserves in the next five years. The National Estuarine Research Reserve System is a network of thirty coastal sites designated to protect and study estuarine systems in collaboration with and service to surrounding communities, including Tribal communities. Tribal Nations are the original conservationists and stewards of the land but are often excluded from federal-state conservation partnerships. This program includes Tribal Nations, and as such, PGST would welcome its expansion as an opportunity to work with the state of Washington to designate and protect local estuaries near our lands.

We urge you to amend the Resilient and Coastal Estuaries Act to include Tribal governments in the Coastal and Estuarine Resilience and Restoration Program and secure its enactment in this Congress.

H.R. 6814, the Resilient and Coastal Estuaries Act, is a good bill that will provide many benefits as set forth above. This bill, however, underscores the need for Congress to enact the Tribal Coastal Resiliency legislation, which has been introduced in several congressional sessions. This legislation (H.R. 3976). would allow the Department of Commerce to award competitive grants to Tribal Nations to achieve tribal coastal zone objectives, including protecting,



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restoring, or preserving areas in the zone that hold important ecological, cultural, or sacred significance. The bill would not only ensure Tribal governments are directly included in Coastal Zone Management Act programs, it would also honor tribal sovereignty and the Federal-Tribal government-to-government relationship and the Federal government's trust and treaty obligations. We look to you to uphold Congress' trust and treaty obligations by furthering long-term conservation efforts and fortifying our efforts to protect and preserve our people, our homelands, and our traditions.

Sincerely,

Amber Caldera
Chair